

St Mary's  *Parish news*

Epiphany 2014



From the Vicar



Dear friends of St Mary's,

Gold, frankincense and myrrh are the abiding images of the Epiphany, and yet what the feast is really about is not these ephemeral things, but what they represent – worship of the true King, the Son of God born in a stable.

Offering worship is one of the key aspects of what it means to be lead a Christian life. What worship looks like in a given Christian community is one of the key factors (though not of course the only one) in helping a person decide whether or not to connect with that community. If “the people of God at prayer” looks like and feels like the sort of community for which that person is searching, then there is a good chance that they will stay. If it does not, then they will not.

At St Mary's, we take our worship, our liturgy, very seriously, 'though I hope not too seriously. The phrase “relaxed Anglo-Catholic” has been used more than once to describe the character of what we do together. Over this coming year I would like us, as a parish, to examine what we do, and how we do it, and whether amidst the many aspects which are good or even very good, there are some aspects that might be reformed or improved. The Magi gave their very best – gold, frankincense and myrrh. We are called to do the same, and it is good practice to ensure that, just as we constantly reinterpret Scripture in the light of ongoing revelation and experience, so we should be open to re-examining our worship in order that it never become “stale” or “tired”. To do so is to take seriously the call to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Epiphany blessings,

Fr Craig.

The Ministry of Angels

Sermon preached for the Feast of St Michael and All Angels, 2013

by The Rev. Prof. Robert Gribben

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. Lk 1:28 KJV

So begins Luke's annunciation of the Good News, with the words of an angel. And 'two men in dazzling clothes', in Luke's account, are also there at the resurrection: 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' (24:4,5b). They are there again asking the astonished crowd at the ascension: 'Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?' And at the end of time, as one modern translation puts it: 'The Son of Man will send his angels, [and] weed out the thistles from his kingdom...' [Mt 13: 41 *The Message*].

So there's not much of importance in the Gospel which doesn't involve angels. An angel announced the birth of the Christ Child, and 'a multitude of the heavenly host' amazed the shepherds with their song of praise. Angels appear from time to time in both Old and New Testaments, in the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword, on the ladder to heaven in Jacob's dream, and Jesus' promise to Philip; and in the Book of Revelation, where the 'four living creatures' are reminders that not all angels appear in human form (and are officially sexless). Remember the cherubim and seraphim. The feathered variety probably came to Judaism and to us from ancient Persian or Egyptian mythology.

Angels are mostly anonymous, but three are named in scripture: the archangels Raphael, Gabriel and Michael. We memorably celebrated Raphael at Michaelmas here a few years ago in a play based on the apocryphal book of Tobit, and a charming tale it is - about a young man's journey, and thus we who travel have Raphael as our patron. Gabriel is familiar from the Gospels. And I spent part of last week gazing at Michael, sheathing his sword, atop Hadrian's tomb in Rome, the Castel Sant'Angelo, from my upper room in the local Methodist Church.

The better attuned to angelic mythology present will also have begun to name others; Colonel Pewter's Uriel; friends of the Coptic community will know their bishop is named after Suriel and there are others (Lucifer, for one), but I now want to say some more serious things! Angelology is a deeply distracting study.

Our normal encounter with angels is right here, gathered as church, where word and sacrament are offered in praise of the holy Trinity. Angels are our companions in both these central acts of the Christian liturgy.

Before I say *how*, let me invite any doubters to hear this, admittedly from a Presbyterian, though a distinguished Swiss one:

the whole of scripture is aware of and bears witness to angels, and thus warns us against putting too much trust in the rationalist mind, which is blind and deaf to the plenitude of the cosmos, inhabited far beyond the range of our perception and the apparatus at our disposal'.

[J.-J. von Allmen].

First, there are the angels of the Word. Those with a low view of sermons (which surely cannot include any Anglicans) may hesitate to recognize the angel standing with me at this lectern. The duty of most angels when they appear is to proclaim a message from God. The Greek word *angelos* means, simply, 'messenger'. When the Word is read and proclaimed, the angels are there to bear witness as co-ministers. In a poem you all know, St Paul linked two languages: 'though I speak with the tongues of men or of angels' as he reminds us of the primacy of love.

Another of their tasks described in scripture is the taking our prayers to the heavenly presence.

And, secondly, the special closeness of angels to humankind is most clear at the Great Prayer of the Church at the altar, when we join with the angels and the archangels and all the heavenly host in praising the Thrice-Holy God. In fact, they rescue self-

consumed human beings from the illusion that we are the only part of creation which can articulate the true praise of God.

Of course, I could have said all I have said about angels by speaking of the Holy Spirit, but speaking of the one does not exclude the other, at least as far as the Bible goes. And though God has made us 'a little lower than the angels', our ministries are the same - they in perfection, we in striving, they in simple obedience, we as forgiven sinners, as we seek to love God with all our being, and our neighbour as ourself. It does mean that the liturgy, the solemn act of worship of the Holy Trinity, is an awesome privilege - and a means of grace.

A story. Some decades ago I was at the liturgy in a Coptic church in Cairo, the priest being my host. After two hours of energetic worship, the final blessing was said, and as the congregation began to disperse, the priest began what you would call the ablutions. He took the paten, reversed it, and rubbed it on the surface of the altar (an electrostatic medium for attracting remaining particles of bread, pre-science). He turned it up the right way, and added some water. Then he threw the water high over the congregation, where it was received with ululation.

At lunch, I asked him what on earth that ritual was about. 'Oh', he said, 'we must always do that. We are giving the angel at the Eucharist permission to depart'.

Au Revoir Catherine King

Susan Walters and Rhondda Fahey

Catherine, a respected and well-loved member of our congregation, is leaving St Mary's in January 2014 and moving to Hobart. We will be sad to see her go. She joined St Mary's in 1995 and it was soon recognised that she is a gifted organiser and leader and a quiet and efficient helper of many people.

Usually at least once a month for fifteen years she has done the weekly vegetable and fruit shopping on behalf of St Mary's at Vic. Markets for Anglicare at the Mission House, Fitzroy. She has enjoyed this work and made friendships among the stall holders,

many of whom have said how much they'll miss her. She was surprised but rather chuffed to be kissed goodbye by one of the burly men! For several years she was in charge of the Devonshire Teas at the Parish Fair. For some years she was a stalwart carer for the church garden. She has been a member of field committees for four years and chaired them for three, representing, with others, a parish viewpoint to four theological students in their placement.

Catherine married Peter Druce at St Mary's in December 2006 (Peter died in June 2007).

Catherine worked as a social worker in child, and family welfare, and most recently in youth welfare where she worked with boys whose behavior was so unmanageable that they had to be accommodated in a specialist program. She was at times also in the School of Social Work at Melbourne University, in practice research projects and as administrative assistant in the higher degree program. In the wider community Catherine has an enduring interest in indigenous education - remember her article on the graduation she was invited to attend in Broome? - and in the renewal of indigenous country - remember her history of Ned's Corner, now owned by conservation organisation Trust for Nature?

Catherine is moving to Hobart to be near her two daughters and their families. She leaves us with some sadness but is moving to a new and challenging part of her life. She will be happy to see anyone from St Mary's who is visiting Hobart. (catherine.king7@bigpond.com) We will miss her greatly and wish her well.

Ballarat Ordinations 2013

Claudine Chionh

On 7 December 2013, hundreds of people attended an ordination of two priests and two deacons in Ballarat. Mathew Crane (known to some parishioners) and Geoffrey Humble were ordained to the diaconate, and Anne McKenna and Robyn Shackell to the priesthood. This was a historic occasion, as these are the first two women to be ordained to the priesthood in the Diocese of Ballarat after the diocesan synod voted to allow the ordination of women in October.

When Garry Weatherill became Bishop of Ballarat in 2011, introducing the ordination of women was one of his priorities for the diocese. All dioceses in the Province of Victoria now ordain and recognise the ordination of women as deacons and priests. The only Australian dioceses where the ordination of women remains restricted are Sydney, The Murray, and North West Australia.

My previous visit to Christ Church cathedral in Ballarat was also for an ordination, a few years ago. The two services were noticeably different in both liturgical style and mood. As a Melbourne moderate catholic, I was struck by the formality and sombre tone of the earlier event and couldn't help being aware of the diocese's status as Victoria's last holdout against the ordination of women.

This December's ordination was a joyful celebration not just of these new deacons and priests but of the event's significance for the diocese. The cathedral was packed with members of the diocese, family and friends of the ordinands, and many who came from across the state to witness this historic event. The procession was led by at least twenty female priests from Melbourne and other dioceses. The mood was light and I saw many in the congregation and the sanctuary breaking into smiles throughout the service.

After the service, many women - especially priests - lined up to receiving blessings from Anne and Robyn. The cathedral hosted a celebration afterwards that recognised the significance of this day in the lives of the four new deacons and priests, as well as for the wider church. While the main reason I went to Ballarat was to support Mathew, who has been a friend for many years, it was also a privilege to be present at this milestone in the life of the church.

A Tradition of Festive Entertaining

Marion and John Poynter

Traditional festive celebrations, feasts, entertainment and hospitality...we think of these as we prepare for Christmas. On Christmas day this year twenty guests—friends and family—will sit down at our place for a lunchtime feast. In so doing we will be following firmly in the footsteps of my grandparents on both sides of my family. Both the Brookes (my mother's parents), and the Smiths (my father's family) were well known for their lavish hospitality, not just at Christmas but also through the year.

When my brother and I were children, my maternal grandmother, a grand socialite and entertainer of many celebrities, would always throw a big Christmas lunch at her seaside home Cliff House at Davey's Bay, Mount Eliza. To this were invited a number (usually at least twenty) of friends and neighbours who were on their own, and family. Our family would move into Cliff House on Christmas Eve and stayed for a blissful fortnight over the summer holidays. My memories of Christmas day come flooding back: the table groaning with silver, the snap of crackers, flaming plum pudding with brandy butter and raspberries and ice-cream, preceded by turkey with cranberry sauce, a big ham, roasted vegetables and a side-salad of tinned grapefruit in lettuce with dressing, all brought to the table by a butler in uniform. And the house filled with the scent of masses of Christmas lilies and hydrangeas. For some years, when my own children were young, we continued to celebrate Christmas at Cliff House.

I never knew the grandparents on my father's side; they died long before I was born. However, more recently I have learned a lot more about them from the biography of grandfather's life that John has just completed. Entitled *The Audacious Adventures of Dr Louis Laurence Smith 1830-1910*, it provides an intriguing picture of his life and times and, in particular, of his capacity to entertain and celebrate. Much of the detail is revealed in the monthly letters he wrote from Melbourne to his mother back in London between 1854 and 1870. When she finally came to live with him in Melbourne, she brought with her the letters, still now held in the family.

Louis Smith's mother was French. Deserted by her husband, she raised her two sons while running a small shop near the present Waterloo station, and in one of his early letters Louis gave a Dickensian account of Christmas remembered there:

'Just at this time you are all bustle, setting out the window for Christmas show. You have got the plums in the window and candied lemon peel etc. all of a row and the Christmas Candles hanging invitingly in bunches for the Xmas boxes for the 'kids'. 'Please give us a Xmas box' 'Go away you young rascal and come after I've had my breakfast' I fancy I hear you saying to the dirty ragged 'starved' little devils hanging about the door.'

Meanwhile in Melbourne, on Christmas Day 1854, Louis and his first wife Sarah Ann 'lived it up ... we made the champagne flow like water... I drank to "absent friends" and thought of home'. A year later Louis wrote 'we shall have a goose for Christmas dinner as we are fattening two, one for New Year's day also.' 'At 7 o'clock on Christmas night I shall lift up my glass to drink your health and that will be with you 20 minutes to eleven on the same morning Christmas Day when you will be looking after the pudding and I shall be eating it. Goodbye'.

Since his mother would not come to join him, Louis sent her a bit of Australia instead. His next Christmas present included 'two possums, four Parroquets and four Diamond Sparrows', which he hoped would live; 'I had a ring tail possum and a flying squirrel but the former died and the latter I am afraid of. *The whole lot are for you*' . . . The possums did not long survive, and

were stuffed; but the birds were said to be 'thriving': her 'Australiana Museum'.

Louis lived above his practice in Bourke Street, where he liked to entertain. He wrote:

'We've had something new here. I've introduced a dancing party every Tuesday night. We know three young ladies, sisters who, with another gentleman, come here, the ladies to tea at 5 o'clock when of course afterward I am engaged until 9 o'clock seeing my patients. We then clear out all the tables, chairs, sofa and bundle them into another room all of a heap. We set musical instruments going, [one] of those large musical boxes. My next door neighbour the jeweller and Plunket, a chemist, then drop in. Mason, my assistant then shows up and Sarah Ann and ladies come in, 'take your partners gentlemen for the first set of quadrilles' and off we go. No ceremony, plenty of good sense, joviality, happiness and laughter then polkas, waltz, lancers and schottische. We have a few oranges and apples cut, biscuits, lemonade and nuts for the ladies and there is plenty of sherry and port and brandy for the gentlemen . . . They break up at 1/2 past 11 and the gentlemen see the ladies home. I smoke my pipe and toddle to bed like an old papa.' [He was 25]

Louis had some interesting friends among the dancers, including one with political notoriety, Mr Seekamp. 'You have read of him. He is editor of *The Ballarat Times* the one that had a fight with Lola Montez and that was a state Prisoner for libelling the Victorian Government during the Ballarat riots [Eureka]. Well he lost two pots of beer but said he never enjoyed himself so much'.

By the 1880s my grandfather had moved his practice to Collins Street, opposite the Melbourne Club, where he lived in much grander style with his second wife, my grandmother, another Marion (known as Polly). The household in Collins Street included a nurse and governess for her four children and at least six servants: 'the most exotic of these was Silver, a Moor whom the Smiths decked out in a claret tunic and turban'. The dining room could seat forty, and my father later recalled it frequently full, especially during parliamentary sessions, when it was my

grandfather's custom 'to dine members of both Houses and distinguished citizens and visitors'. As a child, father remembered more vividly grandmother's monthly 'At Homes', with up to 150 guests; and especially the food.

'A sumptuous repast of tea, wine-trifles, jellies, charlotte rousse, savouries and pastries, claret and hock cups. My mother always insisted on making the trifles, most intricate affairs consisting of sponge cakes, plum cake, ratafias, macaroons, lady's fingers in layers, each layer being saturated alternately with brandy, sherry and port and finally covered with custard and finished off with cream, 'hundreds and thousands' and split almonds. It was a most potent though delicious dish and it always filled me with wonder that several staunch teetotallers (including a well-known cleric) invariably made for.'

Grandfather Smith had another house, at Upper Beaconsfield. In the 1890s, in a letter to a daughter from his first marriage then in London, he described Christmas there;

'At that festive time we had forty-six guests there ... and every one went away delighted, for we had a series of amusements, one following the others, and especially were they pleased with our romantic walks, amongst the beautiful fern valleys . . . We had Crown Prosecutors, Police Magistrates, star actors, head painters amongst Artists, and Prima Donnas, clergymen, merchants and such a miscellaneous crowd of varied pursuits that, what with tales, reminiscences, adventures, songs, recitations, games of every character etc. etc. there was not a moment lost for four and a half days, and then the ride back in all the traps this neighbourhood had finished up the spree.'

Grandfather named the establishment 'Louisville', and in another Francophile gesture tried to establish there an edible-frog hatchery, importing from Paris a stud of twenty-five healthy grenouilles. Unfortunately the frogs, perhaps offended by their enforced migration, refused to breed, and after eighteen frustrating months grandfather disposed of his frog stud by inviting half a dozen friends to consume them with spinach and savoury toast. An unusual repast indeed!

And so the tradition of entertaining is firmly planted in my genes. I look forward to receiving our twenty guests for the Christmas feast. Included among them will be Suzan, a Dinka woman from Sudan, with whom I worked this year at the River Nile Learning Centre, and her two young daughters—Rosanna and Desyre. It will, I hope, be both sumptuous and fun. There will be no servants, such as my grandparents on both sides had, but everyone will help. Various people will bring contributions, ready cooked, for the feast. One will bring a ham, another chickens, another a whole side of salmon (with a wonderful dill sauce), and yet another all the vegetables, and someone else a big salad or two, while another will contribute lots of fresh berries and cream. My Italian daughter-in-law will make a large platter of anti-pasti, while I will make a glorious trifle, along the lines of that made by my paternal grandmother, but with touches borrowed from Nigella Lawson's recipe for Boozy British trifle with its cream topping decorated with crystallised rose petals and pistachio nuts. (In preparation I prepared, a few weeks ago, some of these rose petals by dipping the petals in beaten egg whites and then in caster sugar.) There will also be my homemade Christmas pudding and brandy butter to go with it, as well as cherry ripple ice-cream. And of course there will be crackers and lots of wine. I hope we will play games after lunch, and gather around the piano, with grandson Thomas playing, to sing carols, and make the day an occasion of happy celebration.

John's book on LL Smith will be published in April by Australian Scholarly Publishing. It includes an account of my grandfather's most ambitious feast, the Free Banquet for the People he organised for the first Royal Visit, by Prince Alfred in 1867. 30,000 were expected, 100,000 turned up, but the Prince did not, and the ensuing riot was described by the *Argus* as 'a frightful saturnalia such as we shudder to recall'. Christmas, fortunately, is never like this.

What's Happening in Taradale?

Chips Sowerwine

Susan and I spent a few enjoyable days in Bendigo to see "Modern Love: Fashion visionaries from the FIDM Museum LA." We stayed at a lovely B&B, "Langley Hall." There's an Anglican connection here.



Langley Hall, Bendigo, 14 December 2013

The first Bishop of Bendigo, Henry Archdall Langley, was enthroned in 1902 and the diocese began plans for a suitable palace. Leading architects drew up the plans. For reasons unknown, the site chosen was next to what is now the Bendigo North Parish Centre, some five kilometres from the Cathedral. The Bishop, his wife and their two children moved into what was now Bishops court White Hills in 1905. But alas, Bishop Langley died of a stroke in 1906. He was succeeded by his brother John. And, double but alas for the palace, in 1920, Bishop Baker succeeded John and chose to live in a new Bishops court in Forest Street (now also a B&B). For the rest of the 20th century, Bishops court White Hills was a palace in search of a destiny. After housing returning servicemen, it became St Luke's Toddlers' Home in 1932. St Luke's was closed in 1979 and the building served as a reception centre and an antique store until

the present owners took over in 2000, restored the palace to its grandeur, and opened the B&B.

But Taradale, you ask? What about Taradale? Our friend and fellow parishioner Srebrenka Kunek and her husband John are taking over the Taradale General Store and Post Office!



Taradale General Store & Post Office 14 December 2013

On the way home, we drove along lovely country roads through Sutton Grange to Malmsbury and then to Taradale to visit the soon to be famous Taradale General Store and Post Office. Srebrenka and John will make this a must-stop café which should be open for business early in January. So as you head north, make sure to stop at Taradale for petrol, coffee, and stamps!

'Set Down This': Anglican Epiphanies

Rhondda Fahey

This is the story of two Anglicans, Lancelot Andrewes and Thomas Eliot, who lived and worked three centuries apart, and of the influence that the one had on the other. Eliot is well known as an Anglican convert and twentieth century poet. At Christmas we remember him especially as the author of the much loved *Journey of the Magi*.

Andrewes is perhaps less known. What we need to know about him here is that he was ordained in the reign of Elizabeth I and under James I became successively Bishop of Chichester, Ely and Winchester. He was a supervising translator of the *King James Bible*. Charles I ordered the publication of his sermons by Archbishop Laud.



Between 1605 and 1624 he preached seventeen Nativity Sermons before James I. Two of these, 1620 and 1622, were based on Matthew 2:1-2,

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the days of Herod the King, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, Saying, Where

is the King of the Jews That is born? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him’.

The sermons are complex. The text is largely narrowed to ‘behold there came wise men from the east’ - *Ecce magi ab Oriente venerunt*. In 1620 Andrewes concentrates on *Ecce Magi*. He contrasts the Magi with the shepherds, lists the Gentile components of Matthew’s story, lauds their wisdom, notes the significance of stars, and advises his audience ‘to think and set down with ourselves, that to come to Christ is one of the wisest parts that ever these wise men did, or we or any one else can do in all our lives.’ In passing he reminds us that ‘in the old Ritual of the Church we find that on the cover of the canister, wherein was the Sacrament of His Body, there was a star engraven, to show us that now the star leads us thither, to His body there’. *You can’t help loving Lancelot Andrewes!* Also in passing he relates that the Magi came ‘from their own country’, to ‘a strange land’, on a ‘long journey’, an ‘uneasy journey’, ‘at the worst season of the year’.

The 1622 sermon concentrates on *Ecce venerunt*, thus dealing mainly with their errand ‘which, in a word, is to worship Him. Their errand our errand, and the errand of this day’. Now there is nothing to prevent parts of a good sermon being repeated in later years and this is how Andrewes reworks those passing words from 1620 about the difficulties of the Magi’s journey. I’ll quote it all although the relevant part is bolded.

In this their coming we consider, First, the distance of the place they came from. It was not hard by as the shepherds but a step to Bethlehem over the fields; this was riding many a hundred miles, and cost them many a day’s journey. Secondly, we consider the way that they came, if it be pleasant, or plain and easy; for if it be, it is so much the better. This was nothing pleasant, for through deserts, all the way waste and desolate. Nor secondly, easy neither; for over the rocks and crags of both Arabias, specially Petraea, their journey lay. Yet if safe, but it was not, but exceeding dangerous, as lying through the midst of

the Ôblack tents of Kedar, a nation of thieves and cut-throats; to pass over the hills of robbers, infamous then, and infamous to this day. No passing without great troop or convoy. Last we consider the time of their coming, the season of the year. It was no summer progress. **A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in *solsitio brumali*, the very dead of winter.**

Rather cynically he suggests that his hearers' response to seeing the star might not be 'we are come' but 'we might come when the weather is better'.

Eliot knew Andrewes's work well. In 1928 he contributed an essay to the collection *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*, published by Faber & Gwyer, London. He regarded Andrewes as 'the first great preacher of the English Catholic Church', preferring him to John Donne because of what he terms 'his relevant intensity'. By this he means that Andrewes 'forces a concrete presence upon us before extracting all the spiritual meaning of a text'. The example he gives is those bolded lines from the 1622 Nativity Sermon. He reworks them at the beginning of *Journey of the Magi*:

A cold coming we had of it.
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
the very dead of winter.

Journey of the Magi was first published in *Ariel Poems* 1927 in the months after Eliot's conversion, baptism and confirmation as an Anglican, and a year before the essay itself. Patch-working from other writing is typical of Eliot's style: my copy of *The Wasteland* is tediously and indelibly marked in blue-black as if the lectures were nothing more than which bits were taken from what other writer. Barbour, an Eliot scholar, writes, 'Eliot happened to be

himself steeped in Andrewes at the time . . . but basically he used them (Andrewes' words) because he needed a second voice to precipitate the poetic drama. They must be understood as being read by, or to, the magus and thereby occasioning his own flow of memory'.

But there is more to it than that. In some ways the poem mirrors Eliot's own journey to Christianity - the long and difficult process, the coming to a temperate valley and the dissatisfaction with the old dispensation. Part of any conversion is seeing the star - in the words Matthew gives the magi, 'We have seen His star.....and are come to worship Him'. Part of any subsequent experience is a longing for that first certainty: Eliot looks back, 'I should be glad of another death'. The citation from Andrewes is significant homage to his influence on Eliot's journey.

That English lecturer on the Wasteland with his endless lists who Eliot was using did not have equal provenance for *Journey of the Magi*. I came upon Andrewes' Nativity Sermons many years after I had learned to love the sound of Eliot's verse, read by himself in his dry, dispassionate Anglo-American voice, first on vinyl, then on CD. Rather than spoiling the poem, it enhanced its meaning to know that those introductory words were first spoken at Christmas 1622 to the court of James I by an Anglican bishop whose high churchmanship undoubtedly influenced Eliot's own, just as Eliot's poetry has now influenced generations of Christians.

PS. The sermons and other facts about Andrewes are easily accessible on the web as are Eliot's essay and excerpts from major critical works. Just Google Lancelot Andrewes and *Journey of the Magi*.

The Vicar's Christmas Sermon, 2013

It is perhaps the most obvious, and yet the most avoided, aspect of the Christmas story. We use complicated theological jargon words like “incarnation” to describe it. We create pictorial and statuesque representations of it *ad nauseum*. We sing of babes in mangers and the more earnest amongst us point out that the birth prefigures the pain of the cross. And yet, how often do we just say it out loud? – that God had a body. And that, just as he created that body, he also inhabited it, and was as much a human being as we are – in every way. In birth, in death, in pain, in pleasure, in tears, in laughter, in sight, hearing, smell, touch, and speech. He walked and swam, he fished and hammered, he ate and drank. He did everything we do, because he had a body.

For centuries – millennia even – there have been those in the church who have been doing their level best to repudiate this simple fact by demonising the body and attempting somehow to explain Jesus without it. There were those heretics of the early church who even thought Jesus was purely a spirit – and not a human at all. That, thank the Lord, hasn't been a respectable doctrinal position for a very long time. Fully God, and fully human. God with a body. That has been the church's official position on Jesus since Nicea, and without it the whole shebang of Christianity falls apart. Without Jesus having a fully human body, the crucifixion makes no sense, the resurrection becomes impossible.

Why then, it has to be asked, do Christians have such a reputation for hating the body? Why is Christian moral rhetoric so filled with denunciations of almost any aspect of the physical that is in any way pleasurable, instead extolling the virtues of physical denial, even to the point of denying deep aspects of our humanity, like sexuality, or the physical toll on women of multiple, unregulated childbirth? (just to pick two examples)

During the past week I read David Marr's Quarterly Essay on Cardinal George Pell and the crisis around the sexual abuse of children by clergy, particularly, 'though of course not at all

exclusively, in the Catholic Church. Marr said nothing especially new, but it was sobering to read in a sustained narrative the litany of failures to address criminal activity taking place under the very noses of episcopal and other Church authority. One of the things that struck me, reading this in the week before Christmas, was the point made several times by Marr that the position taken by Cardinal Pell was so closely related to his unstinting advocacy of celibacy for the clergy as the only possible option – that only those who denied key aspects of their body and its functions were fit for priestly office. Marr was right, I think, to see in this blanket denial of ANY expression of sexual identity, the seeds of sexual disfunction and, indeed, perhaps of criminal behaviour. Pell, clearly, was and is reluctant to do so.

I know, a bit heavy for Midnight Mass/Christmas Day, isn't it? And yet, just as this particularly sordid issue forces some at least within the Catholic Church to discuss the question of clerical celibacy, even in the face of a blanket ban on such discussion, so other churches – Anglicans included – need to look carefully and ask ourselves a similar set of questions: is disfunction – sexual or otherwise – something that can at least sometimes, perhaps often, be understood to be the result of the repression of key aspects of our humanity – and in particular the denial of our physical person? If we are to address issues like sexual abuse, whether by clergy or laity, of children or of adults, is it not necessary that we teach not repression, but rather the liberation that comes from understanding that, just like us, God had a body, and a body worthy of respect?

When Mary, the unmarried mother of Jesus, was in the very physical pains of childbirth, her betrothed Joseph stood beside her, watching the most human of scenes unfold. There would have been blood. There would have been pain. There would have been tears of joy. There would have been everything that we understand to be part of this point when life is at its most exposed and its most vulnerable. However Jesus was conceived, his birth was – it must have been – entirely conventional. Because he, like his mother, had a body.

And we do too. And our bodies – in all their strength and decrepitude, in all their beauty and ugliness, in all their function and adornment – are the gift of God our creator. And like all that God has made, they are there to do that which is good, not that which is evil. Jesus – God in a body – understands what we are going through when we struggle with the difficult aspects of what it is to live in that body. Because he felt those things too. But he also understands the joys and the high-points, when pleasure touches us, and we are able to reach out in love to another. Because he felt those things too.

That God took human form in Christ is an essential part of the Christian message. It is good news for everyone. God loves us – and showed that love in sharing with us the joys and the sorrows of being in physical human form. For which we give thanks this night, and indeed always. Amen.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parish BBQ – Sunday 19 January

Please join us for a BBQ lunch after the 10am service on Sunday 19 January.
Friends and family most welcome.
BYO meat and drinks. Salads will be provided.



Ordinations – Saturday 1 February

At 10.30am at St Paul's Cathedral, a number of women and men will be ordained to the diaconate, including our soon to be curate Emily Payne and former parishioner Sharne Rolfe.
All welcome.

Making Contact with St Mary's

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Blog: <http://humanecatholic.blogspot.com>
Assoc Pr: Fr Don Edgar 0418 967 829
Fr Philip Bewley (*away on locum duties*)

The church is open during the day.
Morning Prayer is at 8.30am Tuesday to Friday.
All are welcome, and for coffee afterwards.
Wednesday Eucharist is in recess for January and will
recommence in February and is celebrated at
12.30pm in the Mary Chapel.

The clergy are happy to be contacted to discuss matters of faith
with anyone, and to prepare people for the church's sacraments.

The Parish Office is open
Tuesday 9am-1pm & Thursday 9am-4pm

*If you have little snippets of news that you want included in the
parish news, please send them through to the office at any time.*

**This Edition of the Parish News has been printed in black &
white to help save money. If you would like to view this
edition of the Parish News in colour, please go to our website
www.stmarys.org.au**

MISSION STATEMENT

St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne is an inner-city Christian community that strives to be faithful, inclusive, and sacramental. God inspires us to worship in daily celebration; to be caring, thoughtful and inviting.

In response to God's call, in the next three to five years we aim:

- to grow substantially in faith and numbers*
- to provide ministries and cultural activities that actively engage with people in North Melbourne, West Melbourne, and South Parkville*
- to improve our ministry to and with children and younger adults*
- to manage and deploy our property and financial assets wisely*
- to become more open to change as we learn how to grow*



If you would like to be part of this vibrant community, please complete the details below. We will contact you within the next few days.

New to St Mary's

Name(s):

Phone number:

Email:

Address: